

THE *Lathrop Nor'Easter*

A Quarterly Publication by the Residents of The Lathrop Communities
at Northampton and Easthampton, Massachusetts

Series II: Vol. 4—3

A Community Converses

Summer 2019

ART AND ARTISTS AT LATHROP



"From Wood Pile to Inner Beauty "
by Doris Atkinson

In this Issue:

Many of us already know the two woodworkers featured in this issue for their dedication to the Lathrop land. But Sharon and Doris both have an indoor side that is less well known: each has a love of working with wood to make things that are both beautiful and useful. We hope you enjoy reading about their two very different approaches and techniques as woodworkers.



Sharon Grace can be seen many days all year round, dressed for action in our fields and woods, battling the invasive plants that choke off the vegetation that is essential to the health of our animal neighbors and our immediate environment.

Doris Atkinson has devoted hours of hard work this summer to establish and then maintain the community garden that now is filling kitchens with delicious vegetables in abundance.



Contributing to The Nor'Easter

It's about the poems you write, about the vignettes you've related for years but have never recorded, about the foul ball you caught with your *other* hand (or maybe dropped with the favored one), about a chance elevator ride with a celebrity du jour, about that epiphanic moment when it all became clear, about the first sight of the phantom of delight who changed your life, about that time in the Great Depression or in the War of Your Choice, about your genealogy searches, about your travels, about your work or profession — in short, about what interests you to write, and you know better than we do what that is.

We do encourage all residents to contribute to the Nor'Easter, with poetry, art, photography and both fiction and non-fiction writing. Biographies of new residents are a popular feature.

Submissions can be sent to:
Sgauger@lathrop.kendal.org

The Lathrop Nor'Easter

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE:

JOAN CENEDELLA
SARAH GAUGER
LYN HOWE
SHARON KLETZIEN
BARBARA REITT
IRVING ROTHBERG
STEPHANIE SCHAMESS
ED SHANAHAN
CYNTHIA STANTON

Barbara (“Bobbie”) Reitt*Easthampton*

I was born in Harrisburg, PA, but my family moved to Ithaca, NY, when I was three. I attended the public schools there until college, and I've always thought of Ithaca as my home town. I learned there to love life in a college town, so I'm certainly in the right place now, here in the Pioneer Valley.

My choice of college—Duke University's Women's College—involved a mild rebellion; my very New England and Midwestern family was bewildered by my decision to head to the South, but it was a decision I've never regretted. I majored in English and benefitted greatly from my mentors in that great department. I was awarded a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship, which made possible a master's degree in English at UNC-Chapel Hill. I had met my husband, Pete, at Duke, and we married after a year in graduate school—he at Duke Medical School and I at UNC. We remained in Durham until he finished med school, and I took my first job in book publishing, working on the editorial staff at Duke University Press.

We next moved to Atlanta where Pete began his internship and junior

surgical residency at Grady Memorial Hospital. I started my business as an independent book editor, there being no book publishers in the city at that time. Senior staff at the Duke Press helped me locate my earliest clients, southern university presses like UNC, Kentucky, Tennessee, Georgia, and Alabama. Our daughter was born (at Grady, of course!) in 1967.

These were the Vietnam war years, and newly graduated MDs were certain to be drafted into military service. Pete served in the Navy from 1967 to 1969, during which period we lived in Virginia Beach and then in Beaufort, SC. We returned to Atlanta for Pete's senior residency in neurosurgery, again at Grady-Emory. By the time he had finished, we were in our mid-thirties, had two kids (having adopted our son), and knew that we wanted to put down our roots and remain in Atlanta. Atlanta was rapidly becoming a much larger and more cosmopolitan city, and it was exciting to be a part of all the social and cultural change growth that was taking place.

My own business, now incorporated and called Reitt Editing Services, was serving not only university presses but also state and federal government agencies, scholarly associations, and scientific societies. I was learning how to manage larger book projects that required my assembling publishing teams of subcontractors. One of my earliest projects of this sort was a book on future health care needs issued by the newly formed Carter Center. One of my last projects before retiring in 2007 was a similar project, this one for the American Geriatrics Society.

I did give myself something of a sabbatical (the kids accused me of

suffering from a mid-forties crisis!) when I put the book editing aside for five years to earn a PhD in American Studies at the Institute of the Liberal Arts at Emory University. Despite being the only student on campus wearing panty hose, I loved being back on a campus again to read, learn, argue, research, and write about things that mattered deeply to me. I returned to book editing in a refreshed state of mind.

Pete took early retirement at about the same time that we became empty nesters, and we moved to the mountains of North Carolina, building the house of our dreams near Highlands, NC, on top of a ridge that gave us a view all the way back to Georgia. Western North Carolina is one of the most beautiful (and biologically unique) areas in the United States, and I heartily recommend the Asheville-Highlands-Cashiers region for vacationers. We stayed there until grandchildren became powerful magnets drawing us to the Pioneer Valley. We built a house in Northampton, where we moved in 2003.

We settled in here quickly, finding the Five College Learning in Retirement to be just the thing for finding new friends and providing intellectual stimulation. It was through LIR that we made many friends living in one or the other of the two Lathrops. When Pete died suddenly in the summer of 2017, I found myself rattling around in a lonely house far too big for one person, and so moving to Lathrop myself seemed inevitable, especially as the Easthampton campus put me even closer to my daughter and her family. I've been one of the "Hilltop Ladies" now for almost a year, and I feel totally at home here.

Woodworkers at Lathrop

by Bobbie Reitt, with photos by Lyn Howe

Sharon Grace, Furniture Maker

"It's the process," she says. "If you don't enjoy the process, there's no point in undertaking the project at all."

When we visited Sharon Grace in her Lathrop home to learn about her furniture-making, she showed us three pieces. Two are finished: a simple, Shaker-style night table made of birch and a similarly simple coffee table made of quarter-sawn white oak, a very hard wood. Most interesting to us was the third piece: a partly finished breakfront still needing its central drawers, shelves and doors for the side cabinets, and top surface. It, like the other two pieces, is being done in a style that emphasizes the natural beauty of the wood by avoiding elaborate embellishments.



Sharon has made all three pieces since she and Barbara moved to Lathrop in the fall of 2012. The bedside table was completed and shown at the Hill Institute in 2016; the coffee table was completed and shown in 2017 (see p.2); and the breakfront is still a work in progress. Its unfinished state reveals the complexity of construction that

underlies the simplicity of its style. Sharon has chosen soft maple for the rectangular body and tapered legs and ambrosia (or wormy) maple with distinctive dark streaks in

pale wood for the top surface and for the drawer fronts. The streaks are caused by the ambrosia beetle that burrows through the wood carrying a black fungus on its legs.

She acquired basic carpentry skills early on in Minnesota, building a deck with friends and making basic bookcases. After moving to Williamstown in 2007, she and wife Barbara Walvoord assembled a 10' X 14' shed from a kit. Once she and Barbara settled here at Lathrop, she decided she wanted to continue working with wood and to learn to make useful furniture for their town house. She sought instruction first in Easthampton and later settled on classes in furniture making at the Hill Institute in Florence. She attends a class of ten students twice a week, where she can work on constructing her pieces under the watchful eye of her instructor, Sharon Mehrman.

These days, for each session, she and Barbara must carefully load and unload the unfinished breakfront into and out of the SUV, which fortuitously just accommodates the assembled piece. Despite the inconvenience, Sharon says, working this way provides her access to large, messy equipment that she does not have to house and maintain herself at home, and it provides the opportunity to take on each step with advice as needed from the instructor. Some work, like chiseling mortise joints, sanding, or finishing, she does do at home.



Making each piece entails careful planning and many steps. She starts with plans she draws to actual size on large sheets of paper. These stay with her all the way through the process, and as work proceeds, her own and her instructor's notes are added to the plans. Having completed the plan, Sharon next assembles a list of every single piece of



wood needed, with the exact dimensions for each piece when finished. She and Barbara then go to a supplier of fine woods located in Greenfield, Forest Products Associates. She tries to buy all the wood needed for the entire furniture piece at the outset, though occasionally she has changed her mind about the wood chosen for a part after the planing and sanding reveals its finished appearance, and so she returns to select something else. She explains that it can be hard to visualize the appearance of the finished part from the raw wood at the lumber yard.

Construction follows carefully worked-out steps that can stretch over many months, depending on the complexity and size of the piece. A drawer, for example, cannot be constructed until the cavity that will contain the drawer has been completed. Final assembly must also allow for the seasonal shrinking and swelling of the wood. Sharon's pieces may look simple, but their construction is surprisingly complex. The parts are joined by gluing or by hand-chiseled dovetail or mortise joints. Screws are used only to attach the top of a piece to its base.

Sharon uses only tung oil for finishing her furniture because it is non-toxic. Rather than using mineral spirits to thin the tung oil, she uses citrus solvent, which is 98% citrus peel oil and 2% water.

Sharon acknowledges that progress on any one piece can seem very slow. Patience, she says, is absolutely essential. For visitors to Sharon's and Barbara's home, the enjoyment is in the simple grace of the design of each piece and in the natural glory of the colors and grains of the wood.

Doris Atkinson Creates Wood Turnings

The way she tells it, Doris was born loving to work with wood.



Wood was “of course” something a four-year-old would play with. She was taught early at home to love and respect tools; in nursery school she and the other youngsters were given real tools to

play with—even sharp ones—but there was no instruction on how to use them properly. She remembers being given a wood-carving kit at about age nine or ten and admits that she mostly achieved cut fingers.

Enlightenment began when in junior high school she was one of only two girls who, after exerting much pressure, were allowed to take shop. . . on the condition that they also take home economics. When she saw her first wood lathe at age 16, an antique model worked by wooden pedals like the old sewing machines, she knew that she would eventually have to have one of her own.

Just how serious all this was made evident to us on our visit to her workshop in the lower level of her town house where she laid out for us samples of her own creations. They ranged from the tiny four-inch totem pole she carved as a youngster and painted with water colors to a row of shining, sophisticated wooden pens. The array included vases, bowls, pencil holders, lidded boxes, tops, and Christmas ornaments; all are pieces done on the small scale she prefers.

She bought her first lathe when she was in her mid-forties but did not get to even unpack it much less use it until three years later, having been faced in the meantime with the responsibilities of serving as executor of an aunt's estate. Because this lathe turned out to be too big for the kind of work she wanted to do and required parts that were hard to get, she replaced it with the finer machine she now uses. Her workshop now also includes a table saw, a band saw, a drill press, a grinding wheel to sharpen tools, and the all-important shop vacuums for clearing out the clouds of sawdust her work produces. Numerous hand tools, especially chisels of many sizes and shapes of blade plus gougers



and scrapers, are stored in orderly fashion on counters or hanging on the walls. Most important of all is the safety gear carefully placed on each machine in such a way as to make it impossible for her to use a power tool without first “suiting up.”



As she became increasingly committed to doing wood turning, Doris sought instruction in every direction, combining self-instruction from books and YouTube videos with instruction in classes in Easthampton. Partner Susan Smith has provided a number of the books as gifts over the years.

The sources of the wood Doris has stored on shelves or in bins in the workshop are surprising. Much of it would be considered scrap to the uninitiated. Chunks of firewood are a good source for vases or bowls. The scrap ends from planks of expensive or exotic (“politically incorrect”) kinds of wood for making expensive furniture provide rectangular rods for turning handsome pens. Larger base sections of the trunks of burning bush provide a lovely pale, soft wood for turning objects like tops and ornaments. Doris also uses “bowl blanks” from a supplier; these are about six-inch cross sections of logs from various kinds of trees.



Doris demonstrated briefly the process for making her wooden pens. The metal pen parts in kits that are inserted into the wooden shafts are the only parts of the pen she does not make herself. Each rectangular wooden rod is first cut in two pieces, a longer base and shorter cap. She first hollows out the two pieces

with the drill press and then glues the metal pen tube inside. She then mounts this assembly on a pen mandrel in the lathe, carefully matching the grain of the two parts. With the lathe turning and the chosen chisel held at the proper angle, she moves the chisel back and forth to shave the wooden shaft into the desired shape.

Bowls are done on the lathe in two turnings, separated by periods for drying, establishing the rough shape in the first one, the finished shape in the second. She does bowls in batches. Drying to allow evaporation of the water content of the wood is critical to maintaining an even round shape.

She weighs each bowl repeatedly to assess the loss of water; when the bowl stops losing weight, it’s ready for the next step.

Sanding each pieces follows the lathe work, and she uses grades of sandpaper much finer than would be found in construction of larger pieces. The finishes depend on the kind of piece she’s working on. Bowls require a food-grade finish, for example, that is wiped on by hand. The pens with their high-gloss finish are finished on the lathe using friction polish. Doris describes it as being basically an acrylic glue. Vases that will contain water are completed with a glass insert.

Doris, like Sharon, is conscientious about the materials she works with and safety for herself, her household and, indeed, for neighbors and the lucky owners of her creations. She wears a mask while working. She is careful about sources for her wood so as not to introduce unknown bacteria or fungi foreign to our environment. She keeps her pendant handy in the workshop but does not wear it while working with power tools. She wears either short sleeves or buttoned long sleeves, and no jewelry. A helmet with a clear plastic shield in front of her face protects her while she works at the lathe.

The beauty of her creations comes from their graceful shapes, lovely finishes, and, of course, the natural qualities of the various woods. Judging from the supply of raw wood pieces she has on hand, Doris will stay busy for quite some time producing the lovely objects that grace her home and, indeed, homes of the many Lathrop residents who buy the pieces she donates for our Thrift Shop sales.



Susan H. Bastek, Northampton

My father was a career Coast Guard officer, as was my husband, and because of their assignment changes I have moved throughout the United States quite frequently. I made many moves within the United States, from Maine to southern Florida and from the New

Jersey shore to Hawaii. I loved service life. Every move was a new adventure. I enjoyed seeing new places and meeting new people. Beyond the moves, I have traveled throughout all 50 states, the US Territories, Canada, and beyond.

I eventually landed at Louisiana State University. I enjoyed four years there and left with a degree in Physical Geography. Not long after graduation I married my husband, John, and we went directly to Florida where my husband was to attend Law School at the University of Miami. When he graduated in 1974, we set off for the Great Lakes area so he could pursue his Coast Guard career in Maritime Law and I could pursue my new career in motherhood. Our son Neal was born late in 1973 and our second son, Ian, was born in 1975.

As the boys grew and went off to school I returned to school myself to extend my studies in education and completed the needed credits to teach. I subsequently taught Earth and Physical Science for many years in high school and then Life Science and Physical Science in Middle School. John had retired from the Coast Guard after 30 years of service in 1998 and then worked for the Coast Guard as a civilian until we both retired in 2009.

We had one more move to make. We needed a permanent home. We moved to southwestern Michigan. We loved the area and had family there. We both enjoyed outdoor activities and traveling. I became a Master Gardener and a Master Naturalist and went to work as a Naturalist Guide for our county park system.

Sadly, John was stricken with a neurological disorder and after a valiant struggle he passed away in 2018. We had had 47 good years of love and laughter, two wonderful sons, two great daughters-in-law, and four terrific grandchildren. I still loved life in Michigan but decided after John's death to make one more move, this time on my own, to Lathrop in Northampton, near my oldest son's family. They live nearby in Williamsburg and he works in Northampton. My youngest son is now a Coast Guard officer (a pilot) himself. He and his family live in Mobile, AL.

I am happy to have finally settled in New England and though I am not planning to move again, I still hope to do more traveling. There are many more places to visit and people to meet. The possibilities are endless...

**On Learning That Emily Dickinson's Hair was Red**

...A step like a pattering child & in glided a little plain woman with two smooth bands of reddish hair.

- Thomas Wentworth Higginson

Eye of a pinhole camera, click of a door.
All these years nothing to see of her
save stitched packets of poems,
scraps of wispy calligraphy and one
scratched daguerreotype portrait:
bleached stone for a face, hands
in her lap like picked lilies.

But I want to talk about fire, about
how, when the writing was done,
cup of tea gone cold beside her—
she unwound the coppery coil at her nape,
shook it out like a paisley shawl, torching
the Homestead and the village beyond
with the shock of her unpinned hair.

by Lisa Colt

A Child's Summer, 1945*By Joan Cenedella*

Summer. Summer, summer! The time of year when the sun burns in the sky, and everything is green. The time of year when school is out, and I rejoice: I'm free!

But I forget that somewhere between June and September, I am tired of my freedom, tired of my brother and sister, tired of the dog days, the heat, the cicadas scraping away in the late afternoons and I am aimless.

By the end of July summer school is over, so no more block prints—of trees or dogs or hearts in black or red or green—on special paper almost like cloth. No more luminarias made of tin cans with punched out holes and slits through which the candle light gleams outside on the terrace at night. Or painting a mural with six or seven other kids, huge brown paper hanging on the wall and pots of paint on the floor and each one of us with our part, like when I painted a zebra flying across the African savannah, and Dickie painted a lion perched on a big rock looking down. Or singing in a special group with kids who all have good voices and we harmonize, singing: 'Where ere you-hoo walk' and ending with 'Trees where you sit, shall fall into a shay-hay-hayd, into a shay hay-hade. . . .' or 'When at night I go to sleep, fourteen angels watch do-hoo keep' and we perform for everyone else at the end of summer school.

And then summer school is over and I am aimless and I punch my brother or my sister punches me and we laugh at the grownups and we're bored. Later my brother goes to sleepaway camp but I refuse to go and my sister goes somewhere sophisticat-

ed, like a drama school or something, I don't remember.

The time of year when I stare down insects, a wasp in the steaming heat of the attic where I am poking around, skittering on the window sill. A mosquito alights on my arm and stealthily I pull my skin where his sticker is with forefinger and opposing thumb, stretching, tightening my skin so he can't get out and his belly gets bigger and bigger with my blood and he explodes.

I go fishing. By myself. With a can of worms and a fishing pole that may belong to my brother. I walk along Olmstead Road until I get to the pond in front of the Lofting's house, which is tucked mysteriously away, across the pond, in the woods. Mr. Lofting is Jennifer's grandfather and he wrote the Dr. Doolittle books. He has totally white hair. His wife is much younger and is not Jennifer's grandmother. They don't mind if I fish in their pond.

I sit on the bank and watch the sunnies, their rainbow of colors flashing as they twist and turn, moving through the scotch-colored water. There are many sunnies, so it is not a feat if I catch one. The perch, much skinnier and striped, are rarer and that is what I want to catch. In fact, I bait my hook with the desperately wriggling worm, which feels mean, and throw my line in and wait. And if I catch a fish, oddly, it's an anticlimax and I throw it back in because in truth I'm squeamish. Getting the fish, which I think is why I am there, is never what it promises to be. It's everything that comes before: getting up early and getting dressed in the sleep-

ing house, tiptoeing to the kitchen and going into the fridge and peeling off two or three slices of Velveeta and downing some milk from the bottle and slipping, quietly, outside through the back door. It's getting an empty can from the garage and digging up the worms from the garden and putting them in the can—and all the time imagining myself down there at the Lofting's fishing in the pond.

Later, I walk back home with nothing to do. I lie in the grass and look up at the sky until the world disappears and there is nothing but my eyes and what they see, the blue, the moving clouds. I'm ready to go back to school.

**Twinnie and Bob Magee,**
Easthampton Inn

Twinnie and Bob Magee, new residents at the Inn at Lathrop, are New Englanders at heart. They met in high school in Watertown, Connecticut, and married after Twinnie finished her degree from Pembroke College in Providence, RI, and Bob returned from service with the Seabees. Bob

attended Springfield College where he participated in soccer and baseball, life-long interests.

Early in their marriage, they relocated to Ohio where for ten years Bob was active in Y leadership in Toledo and in Cincinnati, and their first children were born. Their interest in young people, physical activity, and sports led them to running summer camps for children in Ohio.

After their time in Ohio, they relocated to New York where Bob was a coach at Union College for thirty plus years, and Twinnie was actively managing the family, now numbering five children. Bob's coaching philosophy reflected his interest and appreciation of young people. "You have to teach the skills, but you have to take care of personalities. Each kid is different and you have to deal with them as individuals. You aren't just coaching a sport; you are coaching a person." Bob was awarded the New York State Coach of the Year in 1986, and his soccer team of that year was inducted into the Union College Hall of Fame.

Twinnie and Bob moved to Great Barrington and developed a children's camp for boys and girls in North Adams which they maintained for eighteen years, always reflecting their interest in young people. Twinnie says that the purpose of the camp was to be kind to the children, to be personally involved with them, to help them develop, and to make them feel good about themselves. Bob supervised sports activities while Twinnie managed the domestic side of the camp.

Not only did Bob and Twinnie devote their expertise to helping children through coaching and through their camps, but Twinnie earned her master's in education from Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts and

taught in primary school in Pittsfield for twenty years. Both Twinnie and Bob reflect on how coaching, camps, and teaching affect children's future lives.

After retirement, Twinnie and Bob enjoyed restoring their 1880 home in Great Barrington, gardening, and traveling to many places, including England, Ghana, India, Germany, Scotland, and France, as well as places in the U.S.

Twinnie and Bob's five children and eight grandchildren are scattered from California to Tennessee to New York to Massachusetts, yet they remain closely connected, often visiting

and always in touch. Twinnie and Bob recently celebrated their 70th wedding anniversary. The poem written on a plaque that Twinnie holds dear explains:

My heart is fixed
I cannot range.
I like my choice
Too much to change.

Twinnie and Bob came to Lathrop to be closer to their daughter Laurie who lives locally, and they are very happy with their choice. They have found friendly people, good food, and plenty of activities in which they can participate.

Eunice Greenberg, *Easthampton Inn*



In 2017, Eunice moved from New London, CT, to Northampton to be near her family in Hadley. For two years she enjoyed living in an apartment near Smith College, but when the lease was up she decided to explore a more supportive living arrangement.

While in Northampton she heard many favorable comments about Lathrop. After seeing the Inn she moved in on May 1, 2019, and she is very happy with her choice.

Eunice's daughter is a nurse-practitioner in a gynecology practice in Springfield, with a wife who works in the Amherst schools. Eunice's grand-daughter will be going to Northampton High next year. Her son lives out in Montana, where he manages two very busy medical marijuana dispensaries. After going to Montana State University, he stayed to enjoy the outdoors life, and now has two daughters. One of those daughters has given Eunice four great grandchildren!

Eunice went to teachers' college in New Britain, CT, and she married her childhood sweetheart after graduation. She taught second grade in New London, except for two years of her husband's Army service in Texas when she taught kindergarten.

She has been twice widowed, and spent winters in Florida with her second husband. She played tennis in CT, and team tennis while in FL. She enjoys reading, knitting, and has volunteered in the hospitals, and in her synagogue wherever she lived. At Lathrop she is involved in the exercise and knitting groups, and is learning Sudoku. She says she likes the music programs and the movies here, and feels that the transition to living in her cozy apartment at the Inn was very easy.

The Color Red

By *Alaire Rieffel*

I bet you didn't know that the red color of your lipstick might come from crushed insects. Or that the red color in Life Savers and M&M's is or was derived from insects—after all, insects are a popular source of “natural” food coloring.

The history of color, in the form of pigments for dye or for paint, is to me much more interesting than the history of kings and wars. Spies, poisonous wallpaper, pirates, deadly beauty cream...it's all there. And it isn't necessarily history: my most recent Blick art supplies catalog trumpets on the cover “New! Artists' oil colors now Cadmium-Free!” It had never occurred to me to worry about poison in art supplies, but one should, even today in the age of synthetic everything.

It would take books to tell all the stories, so I'll start narrowly, with the queen of color: red. Imagine pigeon blood rubies from Burma/Myanmar. I have a pair of (purportedly) pigeons' blood ruby earrings. One would be a fool to spend serious money at a market in Rangoon/Yangon, and I didn't, so these earrings are tiny, dwarfed by their settings. Just enough to trigger the imagination. Equally beautiful are the wild wineberries that grow invasively in Virginia. They are translucent, and the most beautiful red you can imagine. They taste beautiful, too.

Red is the queen of colors, and the most beautiful red pigments have always come from cochineal, not from rubies or raspberries. Cochineal is a scale-type insect so tiny that they look like white powder when growing on nopal cactus. And it is on that cactus that they insist on growing. And that cactus with cochineal colonies insists on growing only in narrowly defined climates.

Cochineal as a red pigment was discovered by someone lost in history. I like to think that the discoverer was a young Aztec girl who squashed one between her fingers and was astonished that her fingers turned bright crimson, in much the same way that a young French girl discovered the caves at Lascaux. The Aztecs or their predecessors were using cochineal long before the arrival of Columbus, while Europeans stumbled around with reddish ochres and brownish madder, painting caves. In the Middle East weavers dyed yarn for rugs unrivaled even

today for their beauty but the reds weren't a clear bright red. It is no surprise then that the brilliant red of cochineal was considered a treasure, alongside gold and silver, when the Spanish arrived in the Americas. In fact, pirate raiders of a pirate ship were thrilled to see that their plunder was cochineal rather than precious minerals.

Happily, unlike many other pigments, cochineal has never been toxic, but at least some of the mixtures proved unstable as oil paints. Turner insisted on using such a mixture in his paintings, with the heartbreaking result that the reds of his sunsets were becoming orange almost as fast as they left his studio. The color plate of a Turner masterpiece, *The Slave Ship* (1839), in my old Art 11 textbook has a sunset of orange. More like orange squash than blood red, which, given his grisly subject, was probably what he intended.

But then, until recent history, pigments were always chancy. There were no laboratories to quantify ingredients or obtain them from known sources. Artists ground their own colors (or probably had their kids do it.) The artists were forced to rely on itinerant tradesmen for their supplies, and those tradesmen were forced to rely on their suppliers, be they honest men or pirates. Both the pigments themselves, and the media in which they were mixed, were equally problematic. If an artist mixed too thin a mixture, he or she might have months to wait for the supplier to come calling, then only to bring a different reddish substance. The goo might crack, might slide down off the canvas, might dry too quickly or too slowly. All we have to do is pore through a Blick's catalog, or trot down Route 9 to Michael's.

It isn't clear when or how cochineal and other pigments diverged into pigments for dyes and pigments for artists' paints. Cochineal is certainly still used by dyers who are purists about “natural” dyes. I have some cochineal buried somewhere in my garage waiting for me to unearth my dye pots. It looks like tiny pieces of black coal, with red and blue highlights.

Then there is the poisonous green wallpaper, but that is a story for another day.



Peggy Misch, *Easthampton Inn*



Peggy was born in Hartford, CT, and always felt that the Northeast was “home”, although she had been living in North Carolina for more than 50 years when she moved here

to the Lathrop Inn in April. Two of her three daughters are living in Massachusetts, with the youngest serving as a city planner in Northampton.

Her oldest daughter, now living in Acton, MA, was born in Ann Arbor, MI, after Peggy completed a master’s degree in zoology. Her middle daughter is a research MD at the University of Wisconsin, in Madison. Earlier Peggy had taught at Wells College and later taught in two NC universities and a Durham high school, and also held technical research jobs in the University of North Carolina.

The focus of her life, however, has been involvement in activism over the years, motivated by her enduring concern for “the underdog.” She was an army brat, as her family followed her father to his duty stations in Europe after WWII. He served as “governor” in three Bavarian towns near Nuremberg at the time of the trials. Peggy attended the army dependents’ high school and witnessed the trials several times, at least once with her class. However, she was more interested in science than in politics at that time, and she went to the University of Rochester to study biology to become a teacher.

Her career as an activist began with the PTA and the League of Women Voters when her oldest child started school during the early days of integration in NC. She became involved in efforts to encourage communication between blacks and whites, and to move the PTA in a progressive direction. Peggy ran for the school board, a race that she lost, but the political organization she set up was instrumental in the next year’s successful election of

the first black county commissioner, serving 12 years with two terms as chair.

Peggy is still active in several of her old North Carolina organizations. She took part in the fight against the Patriot Act by co-founding the Orange County Bill of Rights Defense Committee, and she is still involved with NC Stop Torture Now, begun in 2005, after the discovery of an airport hangar in a nearby county which was being used by the CIA to carry out the US rendition, detention, and enhanced interrogation program. These rendition flights, flown by NC pilots of Johnston County, took kidnapped suspects to CIA dark sites and Guantánamo where they were tortured. NC Stop Torture Now continues to push for the NC governor and attorney general to make the state responsible and accountable for its role in the illegal, immoral program, insist it never happens again, and make amends to the victims and/or their families.

Peggy has also served on a Unitarian Universalist committee in Chapel Hill, working to prepare a sanctuary for an immigrant refugee. In addition, she has concerned herself with the issue of future peace for the Palestinians, and she worries about the environment and our abuse of nature. When she came to the Inn, she brought with her some of the protest signs used in the past. Some are still unfortunately perennial, ready to be pulled out of her cupboard whenever needed.

Over a year ago she felt the need to live closer to her family and also sort and organize more of her papers, so she decided to move to a retirement community and investigated The Inn at Lathrop Communities. On one visit she happened to meet Peggy Anderson and Andrea Wright, who share mutual friends with her. Since arriving, she has campaigned to have a charging station installed for electric cars and begun an effort to reduce our use of plastics. Look for those coming soon!



*The Lathrop Nor'Easter
100 Basset Brook Drive
Easthampton, MA 01027*

Postcards From . . .



“Just a cliché come to life, we found this man calling snakes out of his basket with a strange flute.”
Jaipur, India. Photo by Lyn Howe